

2003

The Balby Seekers and Richard Farnworth

Richard J. Hoare

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies>

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hoare, Richard J. (2003) "The Balby Seekers and Richard Farnworth," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol8/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

THE BALBY SEEKERS AND RICHARD FARNWORTH¹

Richard J. Hoare

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the group of Seekers which flourished briefly in 1650 and 1651 around Balby,² Warmsworth and Tickhill in South Yorkshire, and explores their origins. They may have numbered up to thirty, and had developed as radical puritans independently of any immediate local Separatist tradition or Grindletonian influence. They joined with George Fox on his arrival around December 1651, providing several pioneers who helped in launching the Quaker movement. These included Richard Farnworth, Thomas Aldam, Benjamin Nicholson, and John, Thomas and Margaret Killam, with Thomas and Elizabeth Stacy from Ballifield near Sheffield. Evidence is presented that Farnworth was born on 14th October 1627, and that he may have first encountered George Fox at Derby in early 1650.

KEYWORDS

Balby Seekers, Richard Farnworth, Seekers, Balby, Thomas Aldam, quaking.

INTRODUCTION: GEORGE FOX'S ARRIVAL IN YORKSHIRE

It is not unreasonable to consider George Fox's arrival at Balby in South Yorkshire in December 1651, and his enlistment of the Balby Seekers among his followers, as the launching of the Quaker movement.

From the birth of Quakerism as an experience, a faith and a form of worship around 1646-7, Fox had been gradually gathering support in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire. He attracted a fellow leader of great value in Elizabeth Hooton of Skegby near Mansfield, and others of more questionable worth like John Fretwell of Stainsby, and Rice Jones of Nottingham. From October 1650 progress stalled while he was in Derby gaol. He had time to reflect on what he had achieved over the previous few years,

and was obviously looking for contacts in new areas to the north. John Leake from Selby in Yorkshire came to visit him. As will be suggested, he may already have met Richard Farnworth from Tickhill near Doncaster, and there is evidence of his corresponding with him from gaol.³ On his release in October 1651, Fox travelled around in the East Midlands for a couple of months, arriving in Yorkshire around December 1651.

This how he later recollected his meetings with a number of Yorkshire Seekers who were to be key associates in spreading the Quaker message:⁴

When I came out of *Darby Dungeon*, in the year 1651. I passing through several Counties, Visiting Friends, I came into *Yorkshire*, to a place called *Balby*, where *Thomas Kilham*, *John Kilham*, *Richard Farnsworth*, and *Thomas Aldam* came to me, and were Convinced of God's Truth; so then I passed towards *Sinderhill-Green*, where some were Convinced,⁵ and so I passed to one *Lieutenant Ropers House*, where *James Nailor* came to see me, where he was Convinced after I had some Discourse with him; and then *Thomas Goodyear* came to me, and after I had declared the Truth to him, he was convinced, and received the Truth; and I had Meetings at *Lieutenant Ropers*, whither several People came, who after they had heard the Truth declared, received it; and at one evening Meeting there, *William Dewsbery* and his Wife came, and heard me declare the Truth.

Here Fox seems to contrast the coherent Balby group with the collection of key individuals centred around Lieutenant Roper's near Wakefield. At Balby he immediately acquired both a team of followers – the Balby Seekers – and an important base camp for campaigning in the area and later (together with Cinderhill) a centre for regional gatherings. After much campaigning around Yorkshire, Fox crossed the Pennines, and with Farnworth and Nayler in support, made his conquest of the Westmorland Seekers and of the Fell household. But the momentum gained on his arrival in Yorkshire six months earlier seems to give Balby a prior claim over the '1652 country' in the north-west as the place where the Quaker movement was launched.

THE BALBY SEEKERS

This group of radical puritans, dubbed 'Seekers' by W.C. Braithwaite,⁶ was based at Balby and Warmsworth near Doncaster and at Tickhill, six miles to the south. It was smaller than the better known Westmorland Seeker communities around Preston Patrick, which provided such a great accession to Quaker ranks later in 1652. However, it played an equally crucial role in Fox's mission, together with others from around Wakefield and Selby.

The leading members of the Balby group, all from yeoman families, were Richard Farnworth, and the Aldam and Killam families, united by two

marriages.⁷ They were evidently in touch with the Stacy's at Ballifield near Sheffield, twelve miles to the west, and with James Nayler and others near Wakefield. Adding the names of the first Quakers (before 1660) to be recorded at Tickhill, who may well previously have been Seekers, and one or two others to be mentioned later, this gives us a list as follows:

Table 1: The Balby Seeker Group

Richard Farnworth (1627?-1666) of Tickhill
Thomas Aldam of Warmsworth (d.1660), his wife Mary (née Killam, d.1660) and his mother Margaret (née Lord)
Thomas Killam of Balby (d.1690), his wife Joan (d.1680-82, née Aldam, widow of Jonathan Broughton) and his mother Anne Hall of Rossington (d.1672)
John Killam of Balby (d.1698) and his wife-to-be Margaret Aldam (married before 1653)
? The following are quite likely to have included some original Seekers, as they were Quakers in Tickhill before 1660: William Bell, Thomas Dam, Robert & Elizabeth Dam, Richard & Ann Farnworth, Thomas & Ellen Farnworth, Edward & Margaret Hickson, John & Anne Lambert, Sarah Nicholson (wife of Benjamin), Samuel Nicholson & wife, William & Troth Outybridge, Thomas & Rebecca Spavin, Robert & Agnus Swift.
? Benjamin Nicholson of Tickhill (d.1661)
?? James Parnell of Retford (1636-1656)
+ Thomas Stacy (1619-87) and Robert Stacy (b.1631) of Ballifield/Cinderhill, Handsworth. Their brother Mahlon Stacy (1638-1704) was aged 13 in 1651.
+ William Aldam of Upperthorpe, Sheffield (Thomas Aldam's brother)
<i>Note: (?) indicates possible members, and (+) likely associates.</i>

The Seeker whose early life we know most about is Richard Farnworth.⁸ He was born at Tickhill probably in 1627,⁹ and his father died when he was a child. Around 1641 his mother put him into service with a puritan gentleman, Thomas Lord of Brampton-en-le-Morthen, eight miles south-west of Tickhill. He recorded¹⁰ that he then became very religious and zealous, and left off sports and pleasures, and was mocked for being a roundhead. At around nineteen or twenty, like many introspective young puritans, he went into a period of doubt and questioning. He came to see 'by searching the Scriptures very diligently, and by the Light of God in my conscience' that the church was built of *living* stones, that church preaching had become 'but ... as a boy that saith over his weeks work at school', that infant baptism was 'a carnal thing', and he found that he could not 'sing David's condition in rime and meeter with them'.¹¹

A crucial experience for him¹² was when a local 'High-Priest' came to prepare the villagers for communion, and was impressed with Farnworth's bible knowledge, but neither the priest's blessing nor subsequently the bread and wine gave him any satisfaction. He was reported to have been influenced by the

writings of John Saltmarsh, and he turned 'Antinomian and Perfectionist [and] pretended to internal Teachings, and immediate Revelations'.¹³ (Saltmarsh's works included 'Sparkles of Glory' (1647), setting out a Seeker position.) When this led Farnworth to stop attending church and Thomas Lord's family prayers, he was dismissed from the household. He records¹⁴ 'some that had command of me in the outward, ... threatened me what they would do, if that I would not go to the Church... so I was made to deny the Priests and all that I had gathered under them... and wait upon God... and in the Light of the spirit of truth I found much inward peace, joy, comfort and satisfaction of my soul.' He subsequently worked for a year on the farm of a Coronet (cornet = second lieutenant) Heathcote. In the appendix I shall suggest that this was a Thomas Heathcote of Old Brampton, Chesterfield, whose son and nephew both became Quakers, and that Heathcote and Farnworth may have met George Fox there in early 1650, before the latter's imprisonment in Derby gaol.

Thomas Aldam of Warmsworth, had also been a puritan. (His family came from Wickersley, close to Brampton-en-le-Morthen, and Thomas Lord was his uncle.) He left the church to become a Separatist, and eventually had a personal revelation in which the power and spirit of God caused his bones to shake and his limbs to tremble, and his mouth was stopped. He saw how formal his religion had been, and 'that the Lord alone was the teacher of his children, that the word was in [his] heart and that the Scripture was the testimony to that word'.¹⁵

The Balby Seeker group seems to have gathered together in 1650. Farnworth was accused in November 1655 of having propagated 'Familism and Quakerism' around Balby for five years, where he 'much frequented and poisoned those silly souls'.¹⁶ The abusive references are not strong evidence that he was at first a Quaker, and certainly not a familist, but they date his return from working for Thomas Heathcote to 1650. He was said never to have lived at Balby, so probably he had returned to live in his home town of Tickhill. Comparison of Quaker and parish registers (table 2) shows that both Thomas Aldam and John Killam decided to abandon baptism for their children between early 1650 and mid 1651,¹⁷ corresponding to Farnworth's return.

Of the Seekers that Fox gathered in at Balby, Richard Farnworth became one of the most important in spreading Quakerism early on. Seekers have been characterised¹⁸ as spanning two extreme types, radical conservatives looking to recreate primitive Christianity, and others looking forward to a new religious dispensation. Those in the North of England, including Farnworth, were predominantly of the former type, and Farnworth was to be much involved in maintaining Quaker unity against those who opposed the increasing discipline of the next few years. Thomas Aldam, soon imprisoned for two and a half years for his faith, was also a very vigorous campaigner in Yorkshire, later working in London and travelling abroad. Benjamin Nicholson, who may have been one of the Seekers, we find working in the South of England in 1653. The Killam brothers and their wives all played a part in missionary work, and John Killam served as treasurer for the Yorkshire Quakers for many years. The Stacy family were to invest heavily in setting up the Quaker colony of West New Jersey in

Table 2: Birth register entries for families in two parishes.

	Warmsworth			Balby (Doncaster)		
		P	Q		P	Q
	Thomas & Mary Aldam			John & Margaret Kellam		
1646	Mary Dec. 1646	+	+	Jane Aug. 1646	+	+
1650	Thomas Mar. 1650	+	+	John Feb. 1650	+	+
1651	Sarah Aug. 1651	-	+	Mary Jul. 1651	-	+
1654				Bathsheba Apr. 1654	-	+
1657				Elizabeth Feb. 1657	-	+
1660	Joseph Sep. 1660	-	+			
1661				Emmanuel May. 1661	-	+

Note: + indicates appearance of a baptism or birth in parish (P) and Quaker (Q) registers. (The Quaker registers were compiled retrospectively.) Note absence of baptism records from 1651. Birth dates have been modernised.

America in 1677, and the two younger Stacy brothers emigrated to become founding settlers there. Thomas Aldam's brother William was an early Quaker in the Sheffield area: it is probable that he also was associated with the Balby Seekers. Very likely there were more members of the group than we can identify, forming the core of the early and vigorous Quaker meeting at Tickhill.

Lastly, one well-known Quaker passing briefly across our stage is James Parnell,¹⁹ from Retford in Nottinghamshire, perhaps the first Quaker martyr. At the age of fifteen (1651) he had an experience of the power of the Lord. He turned away from organised religion, and his family disowned him. He found like-minded seekers 'a few miles from the town where I lived,²⁰ whom the Lord was a-gathering out of the dark world, to sit down together and wait upon His name.' This nearby group was probably actually the Balby Quaker community, as Parnell seems to have missed Fox's original visits there. He was most likely the recipient of a message of love from Farnworth to 'little James' in 1653,²¹ and he went to visit Fox who was at that time in Carlisle gaol, evidently to be confirmed in his vocation. After returning home for a while, he travelled south to Cambridge and Essex, where he spent most of his all too brief preaching career. He was sent to Colchester prison, where he was cruelly treated, and died after eight months, in April 1656.

It has been suggested²² that the Balby and Wakefield Seekers had reached a 'Quaker' experience before Fox's arrival in Yorkshire: that they were already 'finders'. Fox, twenty-five years later, as we have heard, claimed credit for all their conversions,²³ and Thomas Aldam junior a little later confirmed Fox's prime influence in his father's case.²⁴ Fox was certainly disposed to emphasise his own influence at that time. On the other hand not one of the Seekers, whose accounts we have, mention Fox as agent in their spiritual development.²⁵ Farnworth, after

being dismissed by Lord, described his discovery of an inner teacher (as did Nayler and Dewsbury) as a purely personal revelation.²⁶ He gave no datable reference to this event in his life, but his critic actually makes 'inward revelations' and such to be the cause of his dismissal in around 1648. This would mean that, whether or not Farnworth had met Fox at Chesterfield, he brought to the Balby group the Quakers' characteristic inward conviction. Aldam's account, quoted above, suggests a similar history to Farnworth's, and one could read it as indicating that he 'quaked' before he met Fox. On another occasion he 'was taken with the power in a great trembling in my head and all the one side' when warning a judge against taking bribes:²⁷ perhaps he suffered from a form of partial (Jacksonian) epilepsy. Parnell records that before his meeting with the Balby group, 'the Goodness of God led me to repentance and the Grace of God wrought in my heart a Reformation', and that what he found at Balby was not a new prophet, in Fox, but 'a people with whom I found Union'. The early Quakers in their accounts, like Fox himself in his, wished to emphasise the un-mediated personal nature of their inward discovery of Christ. Fox's role may have been to prompt this experience, or simply to help draw out its implications.

It is difficult to delve much deeper for information on this fairly short-lived band. Like many radical groups, the Balby Seekers shared beliefs and practices which were to be absorbed into Quakerism, and which gave Fox fertile ground for his preaching in the north of England. Some of them clearly were already spiritually on the same wavelength as Fox. The trembling and shaking that accompanied Quakers' early ecstatic experiences seems generally to have followed contact with Fox,²⁸ though with Aldam it may have been earlier. But it was Fox's personal power and vision that drew them all together into a dynamic movement.

LOOKING FOR NORTHERN SEEKER ORIGINS

We may ask who were the 'Seekers', and why should they have appeared at Balby? In Civil War times, the term referred to individuals or groups drawn together from different origins: Familists, Independents, Anabaptists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians. They abandoned conventional church attendance and practices while awaiting the appearance of someone manifesting the powers of the Spirit who would bring in a new Apostolic Age. Present-day British Quakers like to think of Seekers as discovering the un-programmed silence-based Quaker meeting for worship, but Seekers also sought, and found in George Fox, a charismatic leader variously endowed with the gifts of the Spirit, including powers of preaching, discerning of spirits and healing.²⁹

A generation later, William Penn was to write of the Seekers, that they:

Wandred up and down, as Sheep without a Shepherd... called Seekers by some, and the Family of Love by others; because, as they came to the

knowledge of one another, they sometimes met together, not formally to Pray or Preach ... but waited together in Silence, and as anything rose in any one of their minds, that they thought Savoured of a Divine Spring, so they sometimes Spoke.³⁰

The Family of Love, arriving in England from Holland a century before, were a small group propagating an inward experience of the true Light, with many similarities in belief and practice to Quakers, and James Nayler's early career as a Quaker shows some Familist influence.³¹ However there is no evidence that Familism was important in the early Northern spread of Quakerism, notwithstanding its association by Rufus Jones³² with the Grindletonians (see below), and the use of the term by mainstream clerics as a general insult for any radical sect. As regards direct Continental influences around Balby, there were Dutch settlers further down the river Don around Thorne and Hatfield from the time of Vermuyden's drainage work in the 1620s, and they might have included Dutch Anabaptists who were thought at one time to have influenced English Baptists.³³ However the plantation of Friends at Thorne came after that at Balby, and we see few Dutch names among Quakers even at Thorne.³⁴

Rejecting a continental connection, a more modern view of the origin of the Seeker/Quaker experience is that it was simply a natural progression of radical English puritanism.³⁵ Roger Brerely (or Brierly, 1586-1637), curate of Grindleton in Lancashire, was a radical puritan with definite antinomian views,³⁶ and Geoffrey Nuttall shows how 'Grindletonian' influence was associated not only with Kildwick near Skipton, but also with Sedbergh (one of the Preston Patrick Seeker groups), and with Independent preachers in certain chapelries of Halifax: Elland, Rastrick and Southowram. There is also a link between Brerely and the old priest William Boyes whom Fox met and convinced in Cleveland.³⁷ There are more tenuous Grindletonian links with Christopher Marshall (1614-73), minister to the Independent (Congregational) community at Woodkirk near Wakefield, to which James Nayler had belonged. Woodkirk is thirty miles from Tickhill, and Fox was pointed in that direction via Ballfield directly after his first visit to Balby. However the Woodkirk congregation excommunicated Nayler when he became a Quaker, and Fox denounced Marshall in typical style in 1652.³⁸ This is as close to Balby as we find any evidence of any Grindletonian influence.

There had in fact been separatist radicals nearby in Nottinghamshire a generation before, associated with the exodus of the 'Pilgrim Fathers'. When Archbishop Toby Matthew (1546-1628) was installed at York in 1606, he had to deal with a group of extremist puritan Nottinghamshire clergy, led by two in-comers, John Robinson (1576?-1625) and John Smyth (d.1612). They were preaching nonconformity and separatism widely among Nottinghamshire puritans, to such an extent that a puritan conference was convened in Coventry, presumably to quieten things down: it decided by a large majority that separation from the Church of England was not the way forward for the puritan faction. When Robinson and Smyth and the defeated minority set up three separatist 'covenanted churches', Matthew shrewdly moved to imprison

some of their important lay supporters. The prisoners were released after a few months when it became clear their leaders would flee the country. No martyrs were made, but thirty-seven nonconformists, ministers and their followers, were fairly firmly pushed into leaving for Holland in 1608, some of them later joining the *Mayflower's* historic journey to America in 1620.

The body of farm labourers and poorer folk in their congregations were not harassed, and R. A. Marchant surmises that 'after the emigration ... like-minded men remained and carried on the tradition, so when the Civil War removed all restraints, they multiplied rapidly as Independents, Baptists, Quakers and in other sects.'³⁹ They or their children may well have become Baptists at Mansfield, some of whom were to become Fox's 'Children of the Light.' The relevance to the Balby Seekers is that the place where Richard Clifton (d.1616) and John Robinson founded the strongest of the Pilgrims' separatist churches was at Scrooby, only four miles east of Tickhill.⁴⁰ This was the home of William Brewster (1560?-1644), one of the heroes of the Pilgrim Fathers' first grim winter in the New World. If we actually look in the church court records for evidence of a separatist group at Tickhill, all we find is that there was a puritan minister resident from 1623, and a congregation which supported him in non-conformist practices. There is no suggestion of antinomian heresy as there had been with the Grindletonians. (Neither was there at Woodkirk, mentioned above.) However forty years seems not too long for the experience of a separatist church in a neighbouring village to re-surface among the puritan congregation of Tickhill.⁴¹

Lastly, we should look for radical social attitudes among local Seekers. We know that Fox was able to play on dissatisfaction among tithe protesters and underpaid soldiery,⁴² and one can understand the appeal to suchlike of Fox's attacks on the clergy and on bowing and scraping to one's superiors.⁴³ One hundred and fifteen years before, Doncaster had been the scene of a confrontation between Henry VIII's soldiers and a rebel army of 40,000 from the northern counties and Lincolnshire, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace. The rebels were a curious hotchpotch of disaffected lords, gentry and commoners, protesting on the one hand against Henry's Reformation from a Catholic standpoint, and on the other against extortionate rents to feudal lords and tithes to absentee priests. These earlier Pilgrims at the crucial moment were thwarted by high waters in crossing the river Don and making use of their military advantage. They were then soon outmanoeuvred diplomatically by the King and dispersed, with around 200 punitive executions. The loyal Earl of Shrewsbury, lord of Sheffield, brought troops to Doncaster for the King, and not surprisingly there is no record of any Pilgrim supporters or martyrs coming from the Sheffield-Doncaster area. However this was part of a province where, perhaps even from the Wasting of the North by William the Conqueror, there had been a tradition of popular discontent with authority. In addition there was a much more recent bone of contention in that the whole population of Tickhill had suffered abuses including extortion, torture and rape during the Civil War when the Scots army wintered in the area in 1645.⁴⁴ Anti-authoritarian radicalism would

certainly have been a strand in the Balby Seekers' attitudes, to which Fox's gospel of social justice would have particularly appealed.

CONCLUSION

In 1650 and 1651 we find a group of Seekers led by a small network of yeomen from Balby, Warmsworth and Tickhill, and possibly including up to 20 followers in Tickhill. No local radical clergy inspired them, and there was no obvious Grindletonian influence. Living in a region with a historical distrust of authority, our Seekers would have grown up familiar with the story of the Pilgrim Fathers of Scrooby, only four miles from Tickhill, as an example of a persecuted separated church of a previous generation. However there is no evidence from church prosecutions of a radical group at Scrooby or Tickhill remaining as survivors left over from the Pilgrim Fathers' exodus in 1608. Equally there was no history of tithe refusal as there had been in Sedbergh⁴⁵ and elsewhere in the north-west, though the popular suffering at Tickhill during the Civil War would have provided a recent local political grievance.

The inward experiences of our puritan proto-Quakers, which seem to pre-figure the Quaker 'convincement', came mainly by individual discovery mediated by the spirit, opinions and turbulent events of the times. Farnworth was influenced by John Saltmarsh's writings of 1646-47, and possibly by Fox's preaching at Chesterfield in early 1650, and was preaching locally himself from around 1650. The Killam and Aldam families, like many extreme puritans, abandoned infant baptism at around the same time, and Thomas Aldam had a personal experience of a mystical kind after becoming a Separatist. (Parnell's story a little later was also one of individual seeking and finding before he reached the Quakers at Tickhill.) After only a year or two, George Fox arrived in Yorkshire, and gathered them into the Quaker movement, in which they provided several of his key early fellow-missionaries. However, through Farnworth's presence, they were probably already under his influence.

APPENDIX

THE EARLY LIFE OF RICHARD FARNWORTH

There is some new local information to offer on the circumstances of Richard Farnworth's birth, and life as a youth and young man. The main historical information about his early years⁴⁶ has come from the first part of his tract *The Heart Opened by Christ* (London, 1654), and from the hostile account of him in 1655 by Samuel Kendall, vicar of Edlington.⁴⁷ In the former he demonstrates to the authorities, using his personal story, how university-trained clergy failed to

bring people into a true religion. Luckily for us he does refer to his age at various points in the narrative, though his object was not historical, and his discovery of religious certainty is described only in general terms.

Let us hear first what Kendall had to say:⁴⁸

These may certifie, That Richard Farnworth was born at Tickhil in Yorkshire, where he hath Lands of five pounds per annum after his mothers decease. He lived about seven years with Mr Lord of Bramton,⁴⁹ carrying very fairly, till at length reading some parts of Mr Saltmarsh he turned Antinomian and Perfectionist, pretended to internal Teachings, and immediate Revelations, renouncing all outward publique Gospel-administrations, and refusing to joyn in Family-worship; whereupon his Master cashiered him; since that I do not hear he hath had any place of settled abode, save onely one year, that he served Coronet Heathcoat in husbandry: The last five years he has gone about deceiving and being deceived, leavening all that possibly he could with Familism and Quakerism: He hath committed to the Press some books of higher account, then the Sacred Scriptures amongst those deluded wretches; two of them I have seen, wherein he expresseth malice more then humane against al Christs Institutions and Ambassadors; they are indeed full fraught with nothing else but prodigious railings, asperst with abhorred blasphemies. About two years since he attempted the seduction of Mr Lord himself; he told him he was sent to him of God, and he would not receive him: upon his inquiry what he was? he said, He was more then a prophet; what art thou then? said he, Art thou Christ? he replied, I am. Hereupon with holy indignation he expelled him; and where he hath been since I hear not, nor that he ever resided at Balby, though he much frequented and poisoned those silly souls. This I declare this November 26.-55. S.K.

The Tickhill parish register shows two likely baptisms, of Richard son of Richard & Gartrude Farnworth on 25th May 1625, and of Richard son of Thomas Farnworth on 14th October 1627. A Richard Farnworth senior died in 1633/34, and Thomas Farnworth junior and senior died in 1636 and 1636/37 respectively. 'Susan w. Farnworth' died on April 27th 1651, and a widow Farnworth (possibly Gertrude) in 1644.

There are two indications that Farnworth was born in 1627 rather than 1625, though neither is conclusive. First he says⁵⁰ 'About the sixteenth year of the age of my natural life' he turned an ardent puritan (evidently after joining Thomas Lord's household), and was mocked as a Roundhead. This epithet was first heard applied abusively to Parliamentary supporters late in 1641⁵¹ by which time an older Farnworth would have already turned sixteen (in May 1641).

Secondly he recounts⁵² that in his twentieth or twentyfirst year 'one came to the house where I lived, a High-Priest, who had been a Captain in the Army', to examine the household prior to communion. This corresponds to May 1644

-May 1646 if he was born in 1625, October 1646–October 1648 if in 1627. If we depend on the phrase ‘had been a captain in the Army’ (my emphasis), then a discharged captain/priest was unlikely to appear before the end of first civil war (1646), indeed in 1645 the New Model Army was being created and new regiments raised. The event was much more likely to have been after the war, when many local regiments were disbanded.⁵³ There were plenty of chaplains in the Parliamentary army, not so many priests who were also officers.⁵⁴ Two known clerical captains in the Derby regiment of horse discharged at this time were Nathaniel Barton (c.1616–1672/73) of Caldwell near Burton-on-Trent, and Joseph Swetnam of Derby. Swetnam became a royalist plotter after the King’s execution: Barton was doctor of divinity (a ‘high priest’?), but by 1647 he was commissioned major in another regiment, and was a serving colonel in 1650 when he was encountered by George Fox in Derby.⁵⁵ An officer from nearer Brampton-en-le-Morthen would be more plausible, but information on local regiments is lacking. However, the date of substantial local disbandment, in or after summer 1646, points fairly strongly to the later birth date for Farnworth.

Continuing his account, Farnworth spent the ‘best part of a year’ (after his twentieth or twenty-first year) ‘running after priests, looking that some of them should be right’. His subsequent dismissal therefore occurred when he was 20 or 21. By this time he had read ‘some parts of Mr Saltmarsh’ according to Kendall. John Saltmarsh, an army preacher, published his Seekerish ‘Sparkles of Glory’ in 1647, but his antinomian views were known from as early as 1646,⁵⁶ so Farnworth could have read them before he turned 22 with either birth date. Kendall then suggests that Farnworth spent an unspecified period after his dismissal, including a year in service, before 1650 (i.e. five years before 1655) when he reappeared around Balby. If Kendall is accurate in his chronology, and he seems well-informed, then Farnworth was dismissed in or before 1649.

Farnworth then describes⁵⁷ consorting with ‘Souldiers and others that feared God’, and the priests ‘called us Tub-preachers and Sectaries and Independents’, so he himself may have started preaching in the late 1640s. Kendall’s next reference is perhaps to one of those soldiers, to a year spent serving Coronet Heathcote, before 1650. I can find no record of a Coronet Heathcote in the usual army sources. However we know of later Quaker Heathcotes nearby. The physician Gilbert Heathcote of Brampton (now Old Brampton), Chesterfield, who married Sir John Rodes’s sister Frances, became a Quaker after 1680, and his cousin George appears as a Quaker merchant in London in 1671/72, later emigrating to Pennsylvania.⁵⁸ Gilbert’s father died a confirmed Presbyterian, but George’s father Thomas, born in 1614, remains a possible candidate for Coronet Heathcote.

This brings us to the fact that George Fox visited Chesterfield in early 1650, and gained several converts.⁵⁹ The interesting possibility arises that Farnworth was working for Heathcote in the neighbourhood at the time, and one or both may have been among Fox’s converts, before the latter’s imprisonment in Derby gaol. This would be consistent with Farnworth’s reference to having corre-

sponded with Fox in gaol (October 1650–October 1651), though his conversion is dated by Fox to later in 1651 at Balby.⁶⁰ Kendall notices him spreading ‘Familism and Quakerism’, a Quaker or proto-Quaker message, from 1650, that is to say before or during Fox’s imprisonment. This presumably represents his return to the Balby area, and corresponds in time to the abandonment of baptism by the Killam and Aldam families.

Thus we have two possible chronologies for Richard Farnworth’s early life, of which the second is favoured by his being called a Roundhead aged 15, and by his reference to the visiting priest when aged 19 or 20:

Table 3: Two chronologies of the early life of Richard Farnworth

	1	2
Baptised	25th May 1625	14th Oct 1627
Father died	1634/35 [Richard]	1636/37 [Thomas]
Joined Thomas Lord’s household	c. 1639	c. 1641
Mocked as a Roundhead	1640–May ‘41 [too early]	1642–43
Encounter with priest/retired captain	1644–May ‘46 [too early]	Oct 1646–48
Mother died	?Sept 1644 [Widdow F.]	?Apr 1651 [Susan]
Dismissed by Lord	c. 1646	c. 1648
Then:		1,2
Farmed one year for Cornet (?Thomas) Heathcote		before 1650
?Met George Fox at Chesterfield		early 1650
Returned to Tickhill area, joined Aldams, Killams, &c		c. 1650
Corresponded with Fox in gaol		Oct 1650–Oct 1651
‘Convinced’ by Fox at Balby		–Dec. 1651

NOTES

- 1 This paper has been adapted from chapter 2 and appendix B of Richard J. Hoare, *Balby Beginnings: The Launching of Quakerism, The Story of Early Quakers around Sheffield, Doncaster and Thorne from 1651 to 1730, with some of their nonconformist neighbours* (York: Balby Monthly Meeting/ Sessions of York, September 2002)
- 2 Balby is now a suburb of Doncaster lying a mile or two to the south-east of the town centre. Originally in Doncaster parish, it was later allied to Hexthorpe.
- 3 In a letter to Fox in 1653, Farnworth says ‘I sent those letters to thee that thou desired to have, which was written when thou was in prison in Derby’ - Swarthmore MSS iii 53.
- 4 George Fox, preface to William Dewsbury, *Works* (London, 1689).
- 5 The Stacy family of Ballifield, near Sheffield.
- 6 W. C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan, 1912), p.58.
- 7 Thomas Aldam was married to Mary sister of John and Thomas Killam, and Thomas Killam to Joan Broughton, Thomas Aldam’s sister. Before 1653, John Killam was to marry Thomas Aldam’s other sister Margaret.
- 8 The variant names Farnworth/Farnsworth were used interchangeably, as were Killam/Kilham/Kellam.
- 9 The evidence for the chronology of his early life is summarised in the appendix.
- 10 R. Farnworth, *The Heart Opened by Christ* (London, 1654), pp. 1–3
- 11 Farnworth, *The Heart*, pp.4–5.

- 12 Farnworth, *The Heart*, pp.6-7.
- 13 Samuel Kendall, quoted in John Stalham, *The Reviler Rebuked* (London, 1657), page un-numbered. 'Antinomian' belief, that faith in Christ put one above the moral law, was considered heretical: 'perfectionism' was the related belief that one could be free from sin in this life, which puritans generally denied. The clergy 'pleaded for sin', as Nayler and Fox put it.
- 14 Farnworth, *The Heart*, p.11.
- 15 Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, p.60 & refs. therein; E. & T. Backhouse and Thomas Mounsey, *Biographical Memoirs of Friends* (London: W. & F. G. Cash, 1854), pp.64-69. I have not found the original source of the passage quoted, which appears in *Biographical Memoirs*.
- 16 Kendall, in *The Reviler Rebuked*.
- 17 This was the same time that another proto-Quaker, Thomas Taylor of Sedbergh, was holding public disputes about baptism with neighbouring priests (*Dictionary of National Biography*).
- 18 Douglas Gwyn, *Seekers Found* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2000), pp. 93-94, 314.
- 19 James Parnell, *Works* (London, 1675), pp. 243-45; Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, pp.188-193 and refs. therein.
- 20 Retford was ten miles from Tickhill, and seventeen miles from Mansfield, home of Fox's earlier 'Children of the Light'.
- 21 Letter from Richard Farnworth to George Fox, Swarthmore MSS iii 52.
- 22 Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, p.58.
- 23 George Fox, preface to William Dewsbury, *Works* (London, 1689); N. Penney, ed., *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), vol. I p.16.
- 24 Thomas Aldam [junr.], *Testimony to the Life of Thomas Aldam...* (London, 1690).
- 25 Rosemary Moore notes that Fox's accounts of the convictions of Farnworth, Nayler and Dewsbury were at variance with their own, *The Light in Their Consciences* (University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p.230.
- 26 Farnworth, *The Heart*; p.11, see also J. Nayler, *Works*, pp.12-13 or Besse, *Sufferings*, vol.II p.4; W. Dewsbury, *Works*, pp.45-57.
- 27 Letter from Thomas Aldam to George Fox and others, 1652, Swarthmore MSS i 373.
- 28 Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences*, pp.144-46.
- 29 For George Fox as healer, see Henry Cadbury, *Fox's Book of Miracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), reprinted by Quaker Home Service, London 2000.
- 30 William Penn, preface (7th & 8th pages) to *The Journal of George Fox* (London, 1694).
- 31 Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *James Nayler: A Fresh Approach* (London: Friends' Historical Society, 1954).
- 32 R.M. Jones, *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 1932), pp.79-84.
- 33 R.M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1909), p.417: but see also Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2nd edn., ed. Henry J. Cadbury, 1955, p. 545n.
- 34 The prominent Quaker Decow family at Fishlake and Thorne were French Huguenots who arrived from Holland with Vermuyden.
- 35 G.F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), pp.178-180.
- 36 R.A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York*, (London: Longmans, 1960), pp.40-41.
- 37 Marchant, *The Puritans*, pp.31,45-47. Brerely and Boyes were prosecuted together with others for unorthodoxy in 1627, and the subject of the prosecutions included 'schism, blasphemy and heresy', rather than the more usual charge of nonconformist church practices.
- 38 Penney, *The Journal of George Fox*, vol.I pp.37-38.
- 39 Marchant, *The Puritans*, p.159.
- 40 Noted in Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, p.58.
- 41 The fact that Matthew did not prosecute the rank and file in the church courts robs us of a useful source of the dissenters' names. A 'Widdow Bruister' died at Tickhill in 1637, perhaps a relative of William Brewster, the principal lay Pilgrim of Scrooby.
- 42 H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.57,82.

- 43 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.232-33.
- 44 T.W. Beasall, *Tickhill, Portrait of an English Town* (Doncaster: Waterdale Press, 1995), pp.103-105.
- 45 David Boulton, *Early Friends in Dent* (Sedburgh: Dales Historical Monographs, 1986).
- 46 See G. Nuttall, 'Notes on Richard Farnworth', *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 48(1956), pp.79-84, and references therein.
- 47 Edlington parish is close to both Tickhill and Warmsworth. Kendall had been present at disputes held by Farnworth (and Fox) at Twycross, Leicestershire, 12th & 17th October 1654.
- 48 Kendall, in *The Reviler Rebuked*.
- 49 Thomas Lord, 1593-1660 of Brampton-en-le-Morthen in the parish of Treeton, SW of Tickhill. Thomas Lord's sister Margaret was Thomas Aldam's mother.
- 50 Farnworth, *The Heart*, pp.2-3.
- 51 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989 edn.
- 52 Farnworth, *The Heart*, p.4.
- 53 Regiments were disbanded from Derby in 1646 (Trevor Brighton, *Royalists and Roundheads in Derbyshire* (Bakewell & District Historical Society, 1981) p.15) and Nottingham (Hutchinsons's) in 1647 - C.H. Firth & Godfrey Davies, *The Regimental History of Cromwell's Army* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p.279 - as were all but three out of 13 regiments from the Association of (seven) Northern Counties (pp.xix-xx, 253-54). A regiment which drew on the Sheffield area (Bright's) was not disbanded at that time (p.525). The total disbanded nationally was 2,500 men (p.xxi).
- 54 E.g. out of 26 prominent Parliamentary captains or higher ranked officers from Derbyshire, only two had served in holy orders - Trevor Brighton, *Royalists and Roundheads*.
- 55 Penney, *The Journal of George Fox*, vol.I pp.2,13 et seq.
- 56 see British Library Public Catalogue entries
- 57 Farnworth, *The Heart*, p.10.
- 58 I am indebted to Len Heathcote for personally communicating some of this family history.
- 59 Penney, *The Journal of George Fox*, vol.I p.1, 'there were several convinced ... and the Lord's power began to spread mightily and his truth up and down in those parts.' Date (old style) 1649 right at the end of the year's record, so probably early 1650 (new style).
- 60 Penney, *The Journal of George Fox*, vol.I p.16. 'Balby: ... where Richard Farnsworth was convinced and several others.'

AUTHOR DETAILS

Richard Hoare is a general practitioner in Sheffield, a local Quaker historian, and editor of *John Hoare: A Pacifist's Progress, Papers from the First World War* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1998). He is interested in computerising Quaker records, and in the contribution of family historians to local Quaker history.

Mailing address: 25 Moor Oaks Road, Sheffield S10 1BX, England.